



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Highlights

March 2020: *The Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge is presently located in twenty-two different locations in the four primary Connecticut River watershed states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge is located in ten locations on the mainland and near shore island along the northern shore of the Long Island Sound in Connecticut.*

Dead Branch Gets a Facelift



Photo Credit: USFWS

Two growing seasons have come and gone since we demolished the former Berkshire Hardwoods Sawmill site. The site was highly altered and contained a large amount of sawdust, which was spread in hopes it would allow for natural regeneration. When the regeneration did not happen, we began to prepare the site for planting grasses as a cover for planned forest restoration. In the process, we discovered decent soil and are anxious to see the results as the 2020 growing season as it progresses.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

Aerial Insectivores Live



Photo Credit: USFWS

Refuge staff are preparing for a new aerial insectivore exhibit at the Fort River Division. This month we trenched and buried more than 200 feet of ethernet cables, conduit and electrical wires, connecting the boat house to a new kiosk located at the trail head. Once complete, visitors will be able to view aerial insectivore nest site activity in and around the boat house via a backlit monitor that is connected to four closed circuit cameras.

For more information contact: Chad_Roderick@fws.gov

More Habitat Restoration at Dead Branch



Photo Credit: USFWS

Part of the restoration work at the Dead Branch Division includes creating vernal pools. Less than 24 hours after the pools were dug, water began to collect. Next steps are to develop a habitat restoration strategy based on the observed hydrology at the site. Our long-term efforts will support the closing-in of the forest canopy and the maintenance of cold water stream habitat. Only three percent of the Connecticut River Watershed is wetland. This restoration will help increase this number and provide much needed habitat.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov



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Westfield State University Students Visit Fort River



Photo Credit: USFWS

Each year, Dr. John McDonald, Associate Professor in Environmental Science at Westfield State University, brings his natural resources management class to the Fort River Division for a guided tour with Refuge manager Andrew French. Issues discussed while walking the trail include managing national wildlife refuges, visitor use, current management projects, internships, volunteering, and employment. In addition, Refuge Manager French provides advice on strategies for developing their careers and being competitive in the environmental field. This year's walk took place on a sunny day in March, with much interest from the students.

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov

New Barn Doors Installed For Aerial Insectivores



Photo Credit: USFWS

At the Fort River Division we added barn doors to the east side of the boat house, allowing us to close the two foot by eight foot opening outside of nesting season. The boat house will serve as an aerial insectivore nesting demonstration exhibit. Nest site activity will be available for viewing via a closed circuit camera system. A kiosk with a monitor will be built near the Fort River Birding and Nature Trail head this spring.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

More Improvements to Fort River Division



Photo Credit: USFWS

This month we excavated 600 linear feet of perimeter around the arena at the Fort River Division, in preparation for replacing the pressure treated lumber around the building. In addition to this project, we are replacing the first 24 inches of siding with pressure treated plywood. Once complete, the building will be ready for metal siding.

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Essex County Deer Yard Survey Completed



Photo Credit: USFWS

The largest Vermont winter deer yard survey in recent history was completed in Essex County. The survey covered more than 200 individual one kilometer grid squares. More than 75 volunteers participated in the project. The North Country Union High School sophomore class completed nearly 50 individual surveys throughout the winter! The project consisted of seven townships, 225 landowners, the West Mountain and Wenlock Management Units and the Nulhegan Basin Division. The project identified critical deer and moose wintering areas in Essex County.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Northern Conte Interpretive Panels



Photo Credit: USFWS

The Conte Refuge staff are currently developing new interpretive panels for four of the Northern Conte Refuge Divisions (Blueberry Swamp, Nulhegan Basin, Pondicherry and Putney Mountain). The new interpretive panels will highlight the ecological importance of the individual divisions. In addition, each of the panels will include updated trail maps. The panels will be installed at trailhead kiosks.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Friends of Nulhegan Basin Meeting



Photo Credit: USFWS

The Friends of the Nulhegan Basin held their quarterly meeting in March. At the meeting members discussed upcoming public events such as youth fishing, bat box construction and National Public Lands Day. The members were briefed by the refuge manager about completed, ongoing and upcoming biological and habitat management projects.

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Aerial Insectivore Exhibit Nears Completion



Refuge staff are building a new kiosk and platform at the trailhead of the Fort River Birding and Nature Trail in Hadley. Next steps are to add a roof, the interpretive panels and the technology for viewing birds nesting in the boathouse. The two six-foot benches will allow visitors to look at the pollinator garden, watch the barn swallows forage in the fields, fly in and out of the colony, and view the video footage of the birds as they nest in the boathouse.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS

Using A Safe Distance for Outdoor Fun



Visitation at the Fort River Birding and Nature Trail in Hadley, Massachusetts has significantly increased since schools in the area closed. The parking lot has been full, with overflow parking up to the access road. In an effort to encourage safe use of this popular outdoor destination we are encouraging visitors to walk clockwise on the trail allowing for safe distances between them. The clockwise direction allows visitors see the natural ecological habitat succession that occurs at the refuge.

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS

Open For Business: Waiting The Arrival of Barn Swallows



Photo Credit: USFWS

The boat house at the Fort River Division is ready for the 2020 barn swallow nesting season. In total there are 162 individual nestsite compartments. We have placed 38 "seed" nests, half of which were heated to a core temperature in excess of 225 degrees in order to kill potential parasites. The remaining 124 available nest building sites are evenly split between small wooden platforms and metal electrical boxes. Seventy percent of the open nest locations face the open window in the building, and thirty percent face away from the opening. The variation in nesting placement and platforms is based on observations made during the 2019 nesting season.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@ws.gov



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Vermont Junior Duck Stamp Contest Held at Nulhegan Basin Division



Photo Credit: Grace Pearce

Judging for the 2020 Federal Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest was held at the Nulhegan Basin Division this month. Grace Pearce of East Burke, Vermont won Best in Show with her painting of a mallard and ducklings. Grace is a student at Lyndon Institute and her artwork will be included in an exhibit that will tour the United States for the coming year.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Targets Arrive For The Archery Range at The Fort River Division



Photo Credit: USFWS

Despite a variety of competing demands and difficulties with transportation, the targets for the archery range at the Fort River Division arrived this month. The archery range will have two options for archers, a twenty-yard range for instructional programs and a forty-yard range for more advanced shooters. Portions of both ranges will be universally accessible. The range will be open for use by groups for instructional purposes beyond what Conte Refuge staff will provide.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

A Team Effort In Cleaning Up McKinney Refuge



Photo Credit: Patrick Comins

On a frigid Sunday in March, McKinney NWR partnered with the Connecticut Audubon Society, the City of Milford and REI to remove nearly 1,000 pounds of trash in Milford. The cleanup encompassed marsh, beach and shrubland habitats centered around the refuge's Milford Point Unit on Federal, State and public trust properties. More than 50 volunteers participated in the effort, with Audubon providing refreshments and REI free giveaways. The Milford Deputy Director of Public Works personally operated a large City trash truck to haul away all the waste.

For more information contact: Shaun_Roche@fws.gov

Conte Refuge Is Facebook Official



It's official! Conte Refuge now has a Facebook page, another communication tool to help us provide information about what is happening through out the refuge. Be sure to "like" or "follow" our page to receive updates from locations in all four states.

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Volunteers Make Things Happen at McKinney NWR



Photo Credit: USFWS

A shout out to two volunteers at the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge who helped Refuge Manager Rick Potvin build two new sign frames for signs being posted at the Milford Point Unit. Volunteers play a vital role in helping refuge staff accomplish a variety of projects on the refuge. We are incredibly thankful for all that our volunteers do on a daily basis.

For more information contact: Shaun_Roche@fws.gov

Community Partners Working For Barn Swallows



Photo Credit: USFWS

Conte staff installed barn swallow nesting structures in a 12,000 square foot building in South Hadley, Massachusetts. While there is no evidence of prior nesting in the building, it is located within suitable foraging habitat. In total, there are 48 individual nesting compartments available in the building, with 16 of them having seed nests already in place. As nesting season approaches we will use vocalizations in an effort to recruit first time nesting barn swallows.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

Happy Birthday National Wildlife Refuge System



Photo Credit: USFWS

On March 14, 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt issued an executive order proclaiming Pelican Island, Florida, the nation's first Federal Bird Reservation. That seemingly small act led to what we now call the National Wildlife Refuge System: The world's largest system of lands dedicated to providing habitat and protection for our native animals and plants. The Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 560 Refuges across the country working to honor President Roosevelt's conservation efforts 117 years ago.

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov